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ABSTRACT

A survey of students' news interests, opinion of the UW Daily (the University of Washington student newspaper), and support for the UW student government and newspaper was conducted, by administering a questionnaire to a stratified random sample of students attending the University. An analysis of the returns indicated that: (1) the students wanted more academic and research news and more on arts and entertainment published. Sports was the least preferred news topic; (2) they preferred moderate over radical political news, and nonpolitical over political news. Females were more interested in radical news than males; (3) they showed more support for the student newspaper than for the student government; (4) nearly all of them felt either unaffected or unfavorably affected by actions of the student government; (5) they rated the newspaper's accuracy, fairness, interest, and informativeness on the favorable side of "so-so"; (6) they rated the present newspaper as more fair and less interesting than its predecessor. (Author/AF)

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IER-167

SURVEY OF STUDENT OPINION
ON
THE UW DAILY *

February 8, 1971

SUMMARY

A survey of students' news interests, opinions of the UW Daily, and support for the UW student government and newspaper was conducted by mail, with a telephone follow-up, during December 1970. A questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered to a stratified random sample of students attending the U of W. Analysis of the 300 returns indicates:

- a) The students wanted the Daily to publish more academic & research news, and more on arts & entertainment. Their least preferred news topic was sports.
- b) They preferred "moderate" over "radical" political news, and nonpolitical over political news. Females were more interested in radical news than were males.

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- c) *They showed more support for the student newspaper than for the student government.*
- d) *Nearly all of them (96%) felt either unaffected or unfavorably affected by actions of the student government.*
- e) *They rated the newspaper's accuracy, fairness, interest, and informativeness on the favorable side of "so-so!"*
- f) *They rated the present newspaper as more fair and less interesting than its predecessor.*

Introduction

Over the past several years, there has been increasing controversy over the policies and content of the UW Daily. The newspaper is distributed free on campus four days a week by a UW corporation. It is funded by a compulsory student contribution through the student government body, the ASUW.

The Daily editor is elected by the Publication Board and direct control of the paper rests in the editor, under the general supervision of the Board. The Board presently represents the ASUW, the University administration, the School of Communication, graduate students, and faculty. A publisher, responsible for overall day-to-day operation and editorial advice, is a non-voting member of the Board.

Strong criticism of the Daily's policies appeared in the Spring of 1970, when local and statewide news media, members of the public, and some student groups opposed the Daily's support of political activist factions both on and off campus. This opposition led to demands that the newspaper be funded on a voluntary basis, and/or that editorial policies be made more responsive to student opinion.

This study, then, attempted to measure some comparative attitudes toward the UW Daily, as of the end of Autumn Quarter, 1970.

PROCEDURE AND DESIGN

At the request of the Daily publisher, a study was conducted of University of Washington students' news preferences, their opinions of the past and present Daily, and the extent of their support for a student government and newspaper. At the end of November 1970, a stratified random sample of 450 students was drawn from the Registrar's list of all students, and questionnaires were mailed to these persons. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a letter from the Office of Institutional Educational Research, guaranteeing the respondent's anonymity.

Of the 450 questionnaires mailed, about 425 can be presumed to have reached their destinations, and 70% of these (about 300) were completed and returned to the Office of Institutional Educational Research. The sample provided for a margin of accuracy of 5%, with a 94% confidence level. Sampling reliability was checked on age, sex, major, and class in school of the respondents (see p. 17 for comparative figures).

RESULTS

News Interests

A question on general news interests was, "Compared to what you are getting now in the UW Daily, would you like more, less, or the same coverage of the following kinds of news?" This was followed by a list of 13 news topics, each with a 5-point rating scale to be checked. As shown in Table 1, the only topics on which the students wanted more coverage were academic and research news (63% wanted more) off-campus arts and entertainment (61%) and campus arts and entertainment (A & E) (60%). Females were more interested in both student political news and student government news than were males, but the modal response for these topics was "same." The least preferred news topics were off-

campus sports (39% wanted less coverage) and sports columns (27% wanted less). Sex of the respondents made little difference in desired coverage of sports, but readership of sports items was predominantly male. (26% of the males and 8% of the females read the sports section "almost always;" 24% of the males and 53% of the females read it "almost never.")

Table 1
Amount of coverage preferred *

	MUCH MORE	SOME MORE	SAME	SOME LESS	MUCH LESS	NO RESPONSE
UW administration news	08	30	49	06	01	06
Student government news	11	30	41	08	03	06
Academic and research news	22	41	26	03	02	07
Student political news	14	24	37	15	04	06
Off-campus news	11	27	40	11	05	06
Letters to the editor	05	20	56	11	01	07
Campus sports news	04	14	54	14	09	06
Off-campus sports news	03	09	42	18	21	07
Sports columns	03	12	51	15	12	07
Campus arts and entertainment	23	37	30	02	01	07
Off-campus arts and entertainment	20	41	24	06	02	07
Opinion columns	06	36	41	08	02	06
Comics	08	18	45	10	12	07

*Unless otherwise noted, figures in all tables are reported as percentages of the total responses.

Coverage of Political Activities

Another question concerned coverage of political activities ("left radical," "moderate," and "right radical") both on and off campus. Of these, the most preferred was "moderate activities on campus." (48% wanted more coverage; 7%

wanted less.) In decreasing order of popularity, the other items were "right radical activities on campus" (34% wanted more; 17% wanted less); "moderate activities on campus" (30% and 23%); "right radical activities off-campus" (26% and 29%); and "left radical activities off-campus" (25% and 33%).

For each of the four "radical" items, female students said "more" more often, and "less" less often, than did males (See Table 2).

Table 2

Desired coverage of radical activities

	<u>MORE</u>		<u>LESS</u>		<u>SAME/NO OPINION</u>	
	<u>Male/Female</u>		<u>Male/Female</u>		<u>Male/Female</u>	
<u>On-campus</u>						
Left radical	28	35	30	16	42	47
Right radical	31	40	23	13	45	49
Moderate	50	49	08	06	41	45
<u>Off-campus</u>						
Left radical	23	29	39	28	38	42
Right radical	25	28	33	26	42	46
Moderate	32	30	20	16	47	54

In a set of four open-ended questions, the students were asked to name organizations and groups of people, both on and off campus, which they thought should have either more or less coverage in the Daily. The categories and number of responses are shown below.

Table 3

Coverage of Activities of Various Groups

A. On-campus--Should get more coverage

<u>Organizations or groups</u>	<u>Number of responses</u>
Moderate groups and activities	28
Cultural, arts & entertainment	14
ASUW, GPSS actions, <u>not</u> political activities	14
Minority groups, MECHA, BSU, etc.	12
Sororities, fraternities, dorms, social activities	12
UW Departmental and Administrative	12
Professional and service clubs	11
Sports clubs and outdoor recreation	10
Academic and research activities	9
Faculty-personalities	8
Left radical groups	8
Environmental affairs	3
Women, Women's Liberation	3
Campus religious groups	3
ROTC	2
Model UN	2
Other	4

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B. On-campus--Should get less coverages

<u>Organizations or groups</u>	<u>Number of responses</u>
Left Radical groups	32
Radical groups in general	21
ASUM politics & personalities	21*
Women's Liberation	16
Athletics & sports	15
UW <u>Daily</u> controversies	11#
Social groups	7
Minority groups	3
Other, misc.	7

*Of these, 9 specifically mentioned the ASUM President.

#Of these 4 specifically mentioned the Daily editor.

C. Off-campus--Should get more coverage

<u>Group or Organization</u>	<u>Number of responses</u>
Local community activities, inc. businesses, U District Center, Free Clinic, etc.	11
Public and social service groups (e.g. Vista, Peace Corp, etc.)	10
State and national politics	9
Art and entertainment	6
Ecology and outdoor recreation	6
None, emphasize campus affairs	6
Other universities	4
Radical politics	4
Religion	3
General news	3
Moderate politics and opinions	3
Any group which affects students	2
Individuals naming one person or group to receive more notice	12

D. Off-campus--Should get less coverage

<u>Group or Organization</u>	<u>Number of responses</u>
Radicals	43*
All-should concentrate on campus	5
Women's Liberation	3

*Of these, 11 specifically named the Seattle, 8 (or 7)

The data in Table 3, A-D, then, support the general findings of the first question. Radicals, and left radicals in particular, are seen as having received too much coverage in the Daily. The present groups of respondents opt for a newspaper which emphasizes news rather than opinion, local rather than less immediate issues.

Another open-ended question, "Are there any specific changes or additions that you would like to see in the Daily?" elicited responses from 50% of the students. The most recurrent answers to this question were that the paper should have more news in it; that its staff (including the editor) should not editorialize; and that opinions of "regular students" should get more attention. Diverse subjects for news and feature stories were suggested; a list of them was given to the editor. The most popular responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Suggested Changes in Daily

	Number of responses
Broader coverage of campus news and affairs	34
Broader coverage of off-campus news	18
More representation of majority or moderate opinion	17
More objectivity	12

Other responses were scattered. If, as seems likely, the request for greater objectivity is another expression of a felt need for more moderate emphasis, the results of this question closely resemble those of previous questions.

The parts of the Daily read most often were "prominently-displayed news stories" (84% said they read these "almost always" or "usually"), and the "Kaleidoscope" column, which is a summary of current happenings that appears on page 2 of the paper (64%). The least popular sections of the paper were sports (62% read it "almost never" or only "sometimes"), and comics (56%). Table 5 gives the precise figures on this item.

Table 5

How often do you read these parts of the Daily?

	ALMOST ALWAYS	USUALLY	SOME- TIMES	ALMOST NEVER	NO RESPONSE
Prominently-displayed news stories	46	38	09	01	06
Letters to the editor	32	28	28	06	06
Sports	17	15	26	36	06
Kaleidoscope (page 2 of the <u>Daily</u> -- summary of meetings, arts, etc.)	39	25	18	13	05
Opinion columns	16	40	23	08	06
Comics (Odd Bodkins)	24	15	23	33	06
Classified advertising	17	22	43	13	06
Official notices	19	27	28	22	05
Editorials	20	41	25	09	06
"Fillers" (odd paragraphs that fill up space)	14	27	33	19	07

There are some indications of systematic class differences in these results. Freshmen and sophomores tend to read Letters to the Editor more with graduate students reading Kaleidoscope to a greater extent.

Students were also asked to evaluate a number of technical innovations in the Daily. Their response to question 7 is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6
New Techniques in the Daily

	LIKE VERY MUCH	LIKE SOME WHAT	DISLIKE SOME- WHAT	DISLIKE VERY MUCH	NO OPINION	NO RESPONSE
<u>Daily</u> "Troubleshooter" column	37	29	03	01	23	08
New page 1 format (with page 3 as a "second front page")	30	34	05	02	21	08
Full-page photographs	37	31	10	05	11	06
Dave Horsey's cartoons	37	31	05	04	16	06

While there is no doubt that most respondents view the innovations favorably, a substantial number show little interest in them. It is certainly possible that if the innovations had not been pointed out in the question, students might not have noticed the changes. Responses were highly similar on all items, with the exception of a larger number of "Dislike somewhat" choices for full-page photographs, and fewer "Like very much" responses to the new page 1 format.

Questions 8 through 10 attempted to assess the Daily on the dimensions of accuracy, fairness, interest, and information on the subjects of UW Administration, Student Government, and Student Political Activities.

These questions drew more "No opinion" and "No responses" than any others in the survey. ("No opinion"/"No response" on these questions ranged from 19% to 38%.) But those students who did have opinions tended to rate the Daily as "so-so." (The other possible choices were "very good," "good," "poor," and "very poor.") Ratings of "good" prevailed only in three areas: accuracy in reporting on the UW Administration, informativeness in reporting on the student government, and interest in reporting on student political activities. Complete results are in Table 7 below.

Table 7
Ratings on Daily reporting

	ON UW ADMINISTRATION	STUDENT GOVERNMENT	STUDENT POL. ACTIVITIES
Accuracy			
Very good	07	07	09
Good	26	23	17
So-so	22	23	17
Very poor	00	02	03
No opinion/No response	38	38	32
Fairness			
Very good	07	06	08
Good	24	20	20
So-so	31	27	29
Very poor	04	05	11
No opinion/No response	24	27	24
Interest			
Very good	06	13	17
Good	20	17	27
So-so	28	25	23
Poor	17	15	10
Very Poor	06	08	04
No opinion/No response	24	23	19
Information			
Very good	08	10	17
Good	25	29	25
So-so	28	20	25
Poor	11	10	07
Very poor	06	07	06
No opinion/No response	21	24	20

Since the Daily published during Spring Quarter of 1970 was a primary source of controversy, respondents were asked if they had read it, and, if so, what their opinion of it was. Sixty percent of them reported reading it, and their evaluation is shown in Table 8.

Table 8

	Rating of Spring, 1970 <u>Daily</u>					
	VERY GOOD	GOOD	SO-SO	POOR	VERY POOR	NO OPINION/ NO RESPONSE
Accuracy	09	18	20	22	09	22
Fairness	09	12	21	23	21	13
Interest	33	27	12	11	08	09
Information	21	22	22	11	15	09

Thus, last spring's Daily got a "poor" for accuracy, another "poor" for fairness, a "very good" for interest, and something between "so-so" and "good" for informativeness. Compared with the present publication last spring's Daily came out as less fair, more interesting, and a little less accurate and informative.

The students were not so critical in their ratings of other aspects of the present paper: 51% of them thought that "letters to the editor on all sides of an issue have about the same chance of getting printed in the Daily;" 61% wanted the paper to be published five days a week; and most of them liked the new gimmicks such as the "Troubleshooter" column, the "double-front page," the full-page photographs, and the cartoons. (But age made a difference here: Older readers were more suspicious of the letters to the editor and were less in favor of a 5-day Daily; younger readers liked the gimmicks more. (See Table 9)

Table 9

Positive ratings of other aspects of the Daily, by age

	<u>Under 21</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>Over 21</u>
"Letter			
"Letters to editor" are fair	61	51	48
Want a 5-day <u>Daily</u>	74	71	53
Like gimmicks "very much"	44	44	29

Despite the fact that a large number of respondents want more general news to appear in the Daily (see Table 2C) only 20% rely on it as their only newspaper. Asked about readership of other papers, they reported:

Table 10

Regular use of Seattle newspapers as major news source

	Number of respondents
Yes, Both <u>Times</u> and <u>PI</u>	19
Yes, <u>Times</u>	44
Yes, <u>PI</u>	12
No, neither	20

Those students who read other newspapers, however, still rated the Daily highest as a reliable source of news on campus events. Their choices are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Most reliable news on campus events	
<u>Seattle Times</u>	30
<u>PI</u>	14
<u>UW Daily</u>	66

The responses to a question on the desired number of Daily issues per week, as shown in Table 9, indicate some discrepancy with the results below. It is uncertain whether respondents would really make use of a Monday newspaper, in light of their report on the number of issues they usually read. (It is frequently found that such figures are exaggerated by respondents.) For example,

in a survey done in spring 1970, it was found that when respondents were asked, "How many issues of the Daily did you read last week?", the proportion saying "four" was 14% less than for the "average week.")

Table 12

Issues of the Daily read in an average week

Number of Issues	% reading
0	06
1	03
2	10
3	30
4	50

The present requirement that a part of student fees be allocated to support of the Daily and Student Government has received much comment and criticism both among students and in the Community. Respondents were asked to express their opinions on whether each student should decide on this support individually. Their answers are given in Table 13.

Table 13

Should each student decide on supporting activities

ACTIVITY	KEEP AS IT IS ---EVERY STUDENT MUST PAY	EACH STUDENT SHOULD DECIDE ON PAYING	NO OPINION
Student government operating expenses, such as officers' salaries	54	37	09
Ongoing programs (commissions) run by the student government	49	41	10
Special programs and groups to which the student government contributes money . . .	40	53	08
The <u>Daily</u>	69	25	06

Asked whether they would support an activity, assuming it were possible to make this decision the respondents made the choices listed below.

Table 14

Activities chosen for support

ACTIVITY	DEFINITELY WOULD SUPPORT	PROBABLY WOULD SUPPORT	NOT SURE	PROBABLY WOULD NOT SUPPORT	DEFINITE WOULD NOT SUPPORT
Student government operating expenses	29	29	18	12	11
Ongoing programs (commissions) run by the student government . .	20	27	34	11	08
Special programs and groups to which the student government contributes money	20	25	34	10	10
The <u>Daily</u>	60	23	11	02	04

The students were fairly consistent in the combination of their answers to the policy question on fees (Table 13) and the personal question on fees (above). For example, students who checked "each student should decide on paying" for a policy question were more likely to check "would not support" for the corresponding personal question than were those who checked "keep as it is" for the policy question. Students who checked "definitely would support" were more likely to have previously checked "keep as it is" than "each student should decide," and so on. The lack of strong support for student government indicated in the previous question is undoubtedly related to the next.

What was perhaps the most surprising result of the survey came from a question on student government. "If student government actions have significantly affected you so far this quarter, in what favorable or unfavorable ways have they affected you?" The students could then check "favorable," "unfavorable," or "student government actions have had little or no effect on me;" and they could write in their favorable or unfavorable comments. The response was as follows.

Table 15

Effects of Student Government

Favorable	2%
Unfavorable	12%
Little or no effect	84%
Both favorable & unfavorable	2%

Comments on favorable effects were:

Funding of Theatre One

Funding of other Programs, e.g., ecology

Youngbloods for Homecoming

Support of child care

Student body president vs. Spiro Agnew on TV

They are "looking out for my interests."

They keep cool when harrassed

They show how little student power there is in changing the Administration

Most of the unfavorable comments were in these categories:

They have done nothing constructive

They have done nothing

They do not represent student, don't encourage enough participation,
have "converted the HUB into a political den instead of a social
gathering place," etc.

Student body president vs. Spiro Agnew on TV

Adolescent behavior of officers

Support of child care, Intramural Activities Building cutback, etc.

Not enough political activity for November elections

Considering that students did give close to 50% or more support to the idea of continuing Student Government (see Table 14), it is hard to interpret the response to that question as any thing but an overwhelming demonstration of optimism, in light of the figures above.

An interesting finding was the report of voting behavior in the Spring, 1970 ASUM elections. Our respondents indicate that of those eligible to vote, 63% in fact did so. The actual voting ratio of all students for that election is estimated as between 25 and 30%. The respondents also report that 91% of those eligible voted in the national election, November of 1970. Some exaggeration of such reports is to be expected on surveys. We cannot estimate its extent, but must caution readers against reliance on these voting figures.

The remaining questions elicited demographic characteristics of the respondent group. These data indicated that within acceptable limits of sampling error, the group of students returning questionnaires reflected the general student body at the University.